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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000362

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [EAGR](#) [ECON](#) [EU](#) [EI](#)  
SUBJECT: IRISH AGRICULTURE, THE DOHA ROUND, AND BIOTECH

REF: A. DUBLIN 356

[1B.](#) STATE 53346  
[1C.](#) STATE 52628  
[1D.](#) 07 DUBLIN 862 AND PREVIOUS

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Classified By: PEO Chief Ted Pierce. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

[11.](#) (C) Summary: Econoffs spoke recently with senior Irish trade and agriculture officials regarding the points in Refs B and C. While they agreed that a WTO deal is even more important now with recent food price concerns, both were concerned about the prospect of an imminent conclusion to the Doha Round. They cited worries over the effect the U.S. farm bill will have on U.S. commitments on agriculture. On biotech, Ireland will continue to allow the importation of genetically modified organisms (GMO) -- principally animal feed -- but would prohibit the growing of such products on its territory. Ireland will continue to abstain on EU votes dealing with the approval of GMOs but is working behind the scenes to try to shorten the time between regulatory approval in the U.S. and the EU. They highlighted the work of the Irish government's Hunger Task Force, noting that it fits in nicely with President Bush's initiative to combat rising food prices. Given the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty (Ref A), the government may have a more difficult time working behind the scenes to affect policy in Brussels. End Summary.

Doha

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[12.](#) (C) Econoffs spoke with Gerard Monks, the Irish lead on WTO issues at the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment, and Aidan O'Driscoll, Assistant Secretary in the Department of Agriculture, about the topics contained in Refs A and B. Monks said that Ireland wants to conclude a WTO deal but must take into account its own domestic farm lobby. As well, the Irish are worried that this year's U.S. farm bill will be a stumbling block in finalizing a Doha deal. O'Driscoll said many in Europe are skeptical that the U.S. can deliver on the commitments that it has made. He echoed Monks' worry that the U.S. farm bill will "muddy the waters," and added that it appears that the U.S. seems more committed to moving forward on bilateral deals (he mentioned Colombia and South Korea). (Comment: Neither said it, but we were left with the impression that they were doubtful that the U.S. administration would press to amend the farm bill if the Doha negotiations resulted in a deal. End Comment.)

[13.](#) (C) Monks indicated that his job of delivering a unified Irish voice on Doha was made tougher with the recent changes in the Irish government. His new minister is Mary Coughlan,

who was previously Minister of Agriculture. Given her vigorous defense of Irish agriculture prerogatives in her previous post, Coughlan could not now come out and easily push for a WTO deal. Because of the lack of political cover from the top, Monks has been trying to build a coalition of WTO supporters to counteract the powerful, anti-WTO farm lobby but to little or no avail. He has approached the Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), the leading business association in Ireland, but its members are split on the desirability of a WTO deal, so they are hesitant to go public with support.

GMOs

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¶4. (C) O'Driscoll said the EU is trying to manage the biotech issue, not create a problem. He wondered whether the U.S. understands the complexity of the issue for Ireland and other EU Member States (Ref D). As far as he is concerned the question of Ireland's domestic stance on GMOs has been settled: Ireland will allow the import of GMOs, specifically feed, but will not produce them domestically. He said that this is a sensible political solution given that Irish farmers do not produce much grain but are quite reliant on beef exports, which depend heavily on GM feedstocks imported from the U.S.

¶5. (C) O'Driscoll said that the Irish government will continue to abstain on GM-related votes in the EU but are working behind the scenes to address the issue of "asynchronicity" -- code for the often significant gap between the approval of GMOs in the U.S. and the EU. He said Ireland would be well-served to shorten this gap and have managed to garner support from other European countries in similar situations. He thought that the U.S. should focus more on solving this problem than lobbying the Irish and

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others to change their voting behavior in the EU.

¶6. (C) Responding to the President's food aid initiative, O'Driscoll highlighted the work of the Hunger Task Force, run out of Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Hunger Task Force is chaired by Joe Walsh, former Irish Minister for Agriculture and its members include Jeffery Sachs, Bono, and Josette Sheeran, Executive Director of the World Food Program. The goal of the task force is to identify how Ireland can best contribute to the achievement of the UN's Millennium Development goals. He said that the government will hold a public event in July to highlight the issuance of its final report. O'Driscoll expects that Sachs and Bono will participate.

Comment

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¶7. (C) Ireland is a bit player on Doha, but Monks' and O'Driscoll's comments about broader EU unease with the U.S.'s ability to reach a deal is noteworthy. With a Green Party Environment Minister and junior Minister for Food, the Irish government has gone about as far as it can go (at least publicly) on GMOs. That said, Irish officials are quite adept at working behind the scenes to push practical policy solutions through the system in Brussels. However, O'Driscoll told us that his, and Ireland's, stature in Brussels will likely be reduced somewhat as a result of the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty. It remains to be seen if this affects Ireland's ability to bring other Member States on board to resolve the "asynchronicity" issue.

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